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SUBJECT: USAREUR MEETING WITH ROMANIAN DEFENSE MINISTER

Classified By: Ambassador Nicholas Taubman for 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) USAREUR Commanding General McKiernan accompanied by Ambassador met October 31 with Romanian Defense Minister Teodor Melescanu. Melescanu prefaced the meeting by expressing his appreciation for the excellent bilateral ties between the two nations, boasting that the partnership between Romania and the United States was the "most solid and reliable" within the NATO Alliance. He added that he appreciated USG support for Romania's hosting the upcoming 2008 NATO Summit. Melescanu stressed that the summit had widespread support from the government and the Romanian public, remarked that he was depending on help from the USG to ensure the summit's success, and evinced the hope that the event would cast a "clear light" for NATO's way forward.

¶2. (C) Melescanu also voiced his appreciation for bilateral military engagement in assuring the transformation of the Romanian military, noting that it was a "good instrument" for this purpose. In a brief overview of military reform efforts in Romania, the MOD said that many aspects of defense reform had already been accomplished, including the introduction of an all-volunteer military. He said that the military had fulfilled its recruitment quotas with no major problems to date and added that the next challenge was in ensuring that the downsizing of Romania's military was accompanied by upgrade in training and equipment. Given that the land forces would bear the brunt of Romania's new military commitments, their acquisitions--in areas including armored personnel carriers and other transport platforms--would receive priority in the next budget cycle. Melescanu provided assurances that his government was committed to keeping Romanian defense spending above the 2 percent of GDP mark, adding that his personal preference was that Romania stick to this defense spending target for the next decade.

¶3. (C) In a reference to the political costs of Romanian military deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan, Melescanu remarked that while every death of a soldier was a tragedy for the soldier's family and community, the level of casualties from overseas operations were still low enough that he did not foresee any "serious political problem" in fulfilling Romania's military commitments abroad. He provided assurances that Romanian military deployments abroad would continue to get the "full support" of Romania's government in the future.

¶4. (C) General McKiernan expressed appreciation for Romania's contributions in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Kosovo, and echoed MOD Melescanu's remarks by noting that he considered Romania among America's very closest allies worldwide. He underscored, however, that we would be in a period of persistent conflict for many years to come, making resourcing land forces a continuing priority. In a reference to Defense Secretary Gates' comments at the October 25 Conference of

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European Armies in Heidelberg, McKiernan noted the need for greater alliance efforts to ISAF, noting that a Romanian contribution of a brigade headquarters in Zabul would be a very good enabler for forces already in place.

¶5. (C) Finally, General McKiernan noted that the primary reason for his visit was to conduct an after-action review of the Joint Task Force East Proof-of-Principle exercise with his Romanian counterparts. He noted that the exercise had validated its key objectives and had made a very good start in preparing the groundwork for an enduring training rotation for years to come. He also underscored the important role that the joint training played in accelerating the ongoing transformation of both the U.S. and Romanian militaries, and concluded that the exercise portended a very positive future for bilateral cooperation between our two militaries. Melescanu echoed the General's remarks about the transformational value of joint training, remarking that the Romanian military had gained immensely from the exercise and was eager to make the best use of future opportunities. The Minister also expressed his willingness to overcome any problems or impediments of a legal or practical nature, and said that the exercises demonstrated that there had been absolutely "no problems" at the level of Romanian public opinion, as they had underscored once again that U.S. forces were welcome guests in Romania. Melescanu also agreed that future exercises might usefully be opened up to include the participation of other countries in the Black Sea region.

¶6. (C) General McKiernan met subsequently with Romanian Chief of the Land Forces, Lt.Gen. Frunzeti, to discuss the future way ahead for JTF-E. He stressed the importance of increasing the level of training to include making the effort more joint and multinational. During the discussions,

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initial groundwork was laid for a follow-on exercise from June to July 2008 at Mihail Kogalniceanu Air Base.

¶7. (C) Comment: From the Embassy's perspective, the JTF-E Proof-of-Principle exercise was highly successful on every count. Our strong bilateral mil-to-mil relations remain a standout including at times when messy politics and bitter political rivalries have been foremost in the news. The exercise was the first major test of the arrangements worked out bilaterally for the stationing of U.S. military forces in Romania under the bilateral defense cooperation agreement signed by the Secretary of State in December 2005. The success of JTF-E also underscores that the U.S.-Romanian strategic partnership remains largely above politics and that representatives from mainstream political parties remain cognizant of the importance of Romania continuing to fulfill its international commitments in such areas as Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Western Balkans. As noted by MOD Melescanu and other Romanian interlocutors--both uniformed and civilian--the exercise helped to cement bilateral military cooperation and served as an accelerant for the ongoing transformation of Romania's military. From a public diplomacy and PR standpoint, it received close scrutiny from every sector of Romanian media, and came through with almost uniform high marks. Moreover, in a region that is one of the poorest in Romania, JTF-E efforts at civil-military outreach, including the rebuilding of clinics and other construction projects also received accolades from local communities. All told, the exercise enhanced the already strong support we have in a country that is already notable for its pro-American sentiment, and has helped set the stage for closer bilateral cooperation in the future. End Comment.

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